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SUBJECT: VIETNAM AND VATICAN PROMOTE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

REF: A) HANOI 275; B) HANOI 1109; C) HANOI 1461

JOINT WORKING GROUP TO MEET IN ROME WITHIN ONE MONTH

11. (SBU) The Government of Vietnam (GVN) has agreed to the establishment of a long-awaited Joint Working Group (JWG) to develop official diplomatic relations with the Holy See. At an October 3 introductory call at the Ministry of Home Affairs' Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), CRA Chairman Nguyen The Doanh told the Ambassador the first meeting of the JWG will be held in Rome in late October or early November. Each state's party to the JWG will be led by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Vice-Minister. The Vietnamese delegation will be led by a yet-to-be-named MFA Vice-Minister and include the Director of the CRA's Catholic Department and another MFA officer. The JWG will establish principles and a roadmap leading toward development of official diplomatic relations.

CULMINATION OF 17 YEARS OF VISIT EXCHANGES

12. (SBU) Doanh explained to the Ambassador that it was always the GVN's intention to have relations with the Vatican and the Catholic Church, noting that even during the war period, the GVN supported the Church's relations with the Vatican although it did not always have good relations with the Catholic Church in Vietnam. He explained that since the first visit of a Vatican Cardinal in 1989, the GVN and the Vatican had set up a mechanism of visit exchanges leading to 15 total visits since 1990: two visits from the GVN to the Vatican, and 13 visits from the Vatican to Vietnam (the last in March 2007).

13. (SBU) Through these visits, Doanh explained, the GVN and the Vatican have increased mutual understanding and discussed important issues, including: the ordination of Bishops, training of priests, travel of Catholic clergy in Vietnam, charitable activities by the Church, and the Vatican's global relations. The January 2007 visit by GVN Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to Pope Benedict XVI and Vatican Prime Minister Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone in Rome launched a new period of cooperation, according to Doanh.

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